

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 005193
ORIGIN SS-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /016 R

66011

DRAFTED BY: EA:JBADER
APPROVED BY:EA:JBADER
S/S:DCAMP

-----104702 101043Z /10

R 092114Z JAN 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA 0000

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 005193

EXDIS - EA ONLY FOR ASST SEC HOLBROOKE ONLY

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FROM SEOUL DATED JANUARY 9, 1978 SENT
SECSTATE WASHDC IS REPEATED TO YOU: QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 0137

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS CINCPAC

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, KS, US
SUBJECT: STRATTON VISIT TO KOREA

SUMMARY: CODEL STRATTON SPENT FOUR DAYS IN KOREA EXAMINING
THE DESIRABILITY OF U.S. GROUND TROOP WITHDRAWAL. IT CON-
CLUDED THAT PRESIDENT'S PLAN WILL CREATE RISK AND THAT
FULL PROPOSAL SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED UNTIL PEACE TREATY
CONCLUDED. END SUMMARY.

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1. AT THE END OF CODEL'S FACTFINDING VISIT, CHAIRMAN
STRATTON ISSUED A RELEASE, WHICH STATED THE SUBCOMMITTEE
HAD MADE THE FOLLOWING PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

"PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

"1. WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD HERE CONVINCES US THAT FULL WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. GROUND COMBAT TROOPS FROM KOREA WITHIN A PRE-SET TIME SCHEDULE WILL CREATE FAR GREATER SECURITY RISKS THAN EXIST IN THE PRESENT SITUATION.

"2. KOREA, IT MUST BE CLEARLY RECOGNIZED, IS A VALUABLE MILITARY BASE AVAILABLE TO THE UNITED STATES IN AN AREA OF GREAT STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TO THE INTERESTS AND SECURITY OF THE UNITED STATES. NO ONE IS TRYING TO KICK US OUT OF HERE OR RAISE THE RENT. WE BELIEVE THE UNITED STATES CAN ILL AFFORD AT THIS PARTICULAR JUNCTURE SIMPLY TO WALK AWAY FROM SUCH A VALUABLE AND IRREPLACEABLE STRATEGIC ASSET.

"3. WE HAVE DISCOVERED THAT KOREA HAS ALSO PROVED TO BE AN EXCELLENT AND VERY CHALLENGING MILITARY TRAINING GROUND FOR AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND MARINES WHICH CANNOT BE MATCHED ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES. WE WOULD LOSE MUCH OF OUR U.S. COMBAT READINESS BY ABANDONING IT.

"PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS:

"1. WE ARE PERSUADED THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT CONGRESS ACT TO PREVENT BY LEGISLATIVE MEANS ANY HASTY, ILL-TIMED WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. COMBAT TROOPS FROM KOREA; AND WE INTEND TO WORK TO ACHIEVE THAT END.

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"2. WE FAVOR BUILDING UP THE COMBAT CAPABILITIES OF THE KOREAN ARMED FORCES ALONG THE GENERAL LINES OF THE 'COMPENSATORY ACTIONS' ALREADY AGREED TO BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA.

"3. U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWALS MUST BE BASED NOT ON CALENDAR DATES BUT ONLY ON CLEARLY DETERMINED PRIOR EVIDENCE THAT NEEDED COMBAT CAPABILITIES, NOT JUST PHYSICAL EQUIPMENTS, HAVE ACTUALLY BEEN TRANSFERRED TO REPUBLIC OF KOREA FORCES.

"4. FINALLY, WE ARE FIRMLY PERSUADED THAT IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT A BASIC U.S. GROUND COMBAT FORCE REMAIN IN KOREA UNTIL THE PRESENT ARMISTICE HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A GENUINE PEACE SETTLEMENT."

2. ARGUMENTS MADE BY THE EMBASSY AND OTHERS ON THE VALIDITY AND THE FEASIBILITY OF THE PRESIDENT'S WITHDRAWAL DECISION HAD LITTLE, IF ANY, EFFECT ON THE SUBCOMMITTEE'S CONCLUSIONS. THEY APPEARED TO HAVE A BIAS AGAINST WITHDRAWAL UPON ARRIVAL, WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN REINFORCED BY SOME EVIDENCE COLLECTED IN KOREA.

3. IN CONVERSATIONS THAT THE CODEL HAD WITH U.S. AND ROK OFFICIALS, IT SEEMED TO BE CONSIDERING ATTACHING A RIDER TO THE EQUIPMENT TRANSFER COMPENSATORY PACKAGE, WHICH WOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF BLOCKING OR AT LEAST DELAYING THE FINAL STAGES OF THE WITHDRAWAL. IN ADDITION TO THE CRITERIA ESTABLISHED IN PARAGRAPH FOUR OF THE "PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS" (WHICH WE AND PRESIDENT PARK TOLD THE CODEL WASN'T LIKELY TO HAPPEN IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE), CODEL WAS ALSO CONSIDERING EXTENDING THE WITHDRAWAL PERIOD BEYOND THE FOUR TO FIVE YEARS ALREADY AGREED TO AND INCLUDING IN THE PROGRAM AN AUTOMATIC CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW PROCESS TO ENSURE THAT ROK FORCES HAD ABSORBED ADEQUATELY THE EQUIPMENT THAT WAS BEING TURNED OVER TO THEM. CODEL ALSO DISCUSSED OTHER CRITERIA POSSIBILITIES, SUCH AS CROSS RECOGNITION, FOUR-POWER PEACE CONFERENCE, OR MORE PERMANENT STABILITY

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MEASURES BEYOND THE CURRENT ARMISTICE AGREEMENT.

4. THE CODEL MET ALSO WITH PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER, FOREIGN MINISTER, DEFENSE MINISTER AND SPEAKER AND SAW A NUMBER OF KOREAN PERSONALITIES AT A VARIETY OF SOCIAL OCCASIONS. THE PRIME MINISTER, IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH CODEL, EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL OF THE COMPENSATORY MEASURES. FOREIGN MINISTER SUGGESTED THAT WITHDRAWAL TIMETABLE WAS TOO RAPID AND THAT KOREA NEEDED MORE TIME THAN THE FOUR-FIVE YEARS PROPOSED. HE ALSO NOTED THE DESIRABILITY OF EXTRACTING A QUID PRO QUO FROM THE NORTH KOREANS IN RETURN FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT PRIMARY ROK CONCERN AT THIS JUNCTURE WAS TO SEE THAT COMPENSATORY MEASURES WERE PROMPTLY ENACTED BY THE CONGRESS. HE ALSO STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF CONGRESSIONAL UNANIMITY IN SUPPORTING THE COMPENSATORY PACKAGE FOR THE ROK IN ORDER TO HAVE THE MOST BENEFICIAL IMPACT ON THE NORTH KOREANS. STRATTON NOTED THAT IF CONGRESS WAS TO BE ABLE TO COMPEL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE WITHDRAWAL PROPOSAL, IT WOULD HAVE TO USE THE LEVERAGE PROVIDED BY THE APPROPRIATION PROCESS IN CONNECTION WITH THE COMPENSATORY PACKAGE--WRITING INTO THE LEGISLATION SUCH PROVISIONS AS A REQUIREMENT THAT NO MORE THAN 6000 TROOPS COULD BE WITHDRAWN UNTIL THE ADMINISTRATION HAD REPORTED TO THE CONGRESS ON PROGRESS IN NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO THE REDUCTION OF TENSIONS IN THE PENINSULA.

5. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER CHONG IL-KWON REVIEWED WITH CODEL SIGNIFICANCE OF KOREA IN REGIONAL POWER BALANCE AND URGED THAT WITHDRAWAL TAKE PLACE OVER TEN RATHER THAN FIVE YEARS. CHAIRMAN STRATTON RESPONDED THAT CODEL WOULD HAVE THIS SUGGESTION VERY MUCH IN MIND WHEN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MODIFICATIONS TO THE WITHDRAWAL PROPOSAL TO THE COMMITTEE.

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STERN UNQUOTE VANCE

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VISITS, CODELS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE005193
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: EA:JBADER
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780014-0590
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780184/aaaactfd.tel
Line Count: 176
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 4fb96de5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY, EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY, EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3805988
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STRATTON VISIT TO KOREA SUMMARY: CODEL STRATTON SPENT FOUR DAYS IN KOREA EXAMINING THE DESIRABILITY OF U.S. GROUND TROOP WITHDRAWAL.
TAGS: MPOL, OREP, KS, US, (STRATTON, SAMUEL S)
To: MANILA
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4fb96de5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014